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SUBJECT: MOFAZ AND LIVNI DO BATTLE AHEAD OF "DECISIVE"
PARTY MEETING LATER THIS MONTH

REF: A. TEL AVIV 00137
[1](#)B. 09 TEL AVIV 02813

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Kadima infighting continues ahead of the Kadima Council meeting scheduled for February 24 that is to consider a proposal to move party leadership primaries up from the scheduled date of 2013 to some time in 2010. Former Defense Minister and party number two Shaul Mofaz reportedly has threatened to split the party, with all the personal political risks that entails for him. Kadima Chairman Tzipi Livni's handling of the tensions with Mofaz has again highlighted criticisms of her leadership and decisiveness. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Israeli journalists the second week of February highlighted the continuing escalation in tensions between Mofaz and Livni. Yediot Aharonoth, the leading Israeli daily, reported on February 11 that Mofaz had given Livni an ultimatum to make an unequivocal decision by the end of the month whether or not to move up the primary date. Mofaz previously had declared he had no intention of splitting the party, as his preference was to lead it into the next election and become prime minister. Mofaz's associates have been tight-lipped about their planning, so it is difficult to tell whether his threats to leave the party are genuine or just further posturing. A decision to leave the party, though, would be a serious gamble for Mofaz because while he does not enjoy being a small fish in the big pond that is Kadima, his long-term political fortunes probably would not rise by being the big fish in the small pond that would be a break-away faction.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The lingering battle is not helping Livni politically, as it reinforces doubts that she can lead effectively. Not only does she appear to be struggling to keep the rest of the party unified, but her unwillingness to provide a final response to the primary election question provides yet another indication that Livni has difficulties acting decisively. Her associates continue to leak reports to the press that she has solid backing within the party to both withstand an effort to bring forward the vote and prevail in the primary whenever it is held. They also note that a Mofaz departure would rid the party of some of its more divisive elements. This begs the question, then, why Livni has not chosen to call Mofaz's bluff and either have the vote or reject his proposal outright and risk him leaving the party.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to observe from the sidelines, occasionally having an emissary dangle new offers to entice Mofaz and other erstwhile Kadima member to leave that party, according to Israeli press reports. He also may entice wavering Kadima members with a peace process strategy that they feel comfortable with. One thing Netanyahu will have difficulty offering are reserved slots on the Likud slate in the next election for any Kadima defectors. Newly elected and generally hard-line Likud MKs have spoken out against such a move, citing concerns about

the "left wing" orientation of Kadima MKs. More likely, however, these new MKs know that their prospects for getting elected to the next Knesset would decline if senior Kadima MKs made the switch to Likud.

Cunningham